MeSH Potatoes: A brief introduction to MeSH headings

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with material adapted from a presentation by

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Introduction/Objectives

- Introduce MeSH headings
- MeSH and textword searching
- Initial search

MeSH Headings

- Medical Subject Headings
- Keywords used to index articles in MEDLINE database
- Determined by authors and professional indexers at NLM

MeSH Headings

- Each article will have one or more headings assigned as its main focus
- Ovid allows a choice, "**Focus**", which will find only articles in which your term is assigned as a main focus

MeSH Headings

- MeSH headings have a hierarchy:
  - Main headings -> **Coronary Disease**
  - Related headings -> Angina Pectoris
  - Subheadings -> *therapy*
- Ovid allows a choice, "**Explode**", which allows searching of a main heading AND all its related headings simultaneously

MeSH vs Textword

- MeSH
  - More specific, less sensitive
  - Help to organize HUGE database
  - May not be current! (losartan)
  - Terms may not always be accurately assigned

MeSH vs. Textwords

- Textwords
  - More sensitive, less specific
  - Words present in title, abstract etc.
  - Helpful for newer information that may not have been indexed

MeSH vs. Textwords

- In general, use MeSH to search initially
- UNLESS
  - Newer topic
  - Want very broad search
  - MeSH not present

Initial Search

- Explode or focus
  - Explode is best
- Subheadings
  - Include all, broad search
  - Can help to limit
- **Search MeSH AND textword for broadest search**

Conclusion

- MeSH headings organize the information in the MEDLINE database
- Plan to use MeSH headings for most initial searches
- Try “Explode” and “Focus” for broad and narrow searches respectively